

# THE CONSEQUENCES OF US DOMESTIC POLITICS ON AFGHANISTAN

## **Ali Aslan, International TV Presenter and journalist**

Jim, I know you wanted to jump in earlier following Renaud's remarks.

## **Jim Bittermann, CNN's Senior European Correspondent in Paris**

I just want to take it forward one tiny notch. Yesterday, President Macron had a conversation with Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud in Saudi Arabia, and one of the topics of their conversation was Afghanistan. We do not know what they talked about – the Elysée is not saying. In any case, that conversation about Afghanistan has taken place and perhaps maybe is leading to something further such as the opening of schools and who knows what.

Secondly, I just wanted to take objection to your characterization of betrayal, the US betrayal of Afghanistan. If it was a betrayal, it was a betrayal that was very costly. The US paid dearly for that betrayal – \$1 trillion and 6,000 lives. So, it was not a betrayal, it was a failure. The General said that as much in a very humble way. They were totally humiliated in front of the Congress, admitting that the Taliban were now in power, the enemy was now in power in Kabul.

It was a failure, but betrayal – I do not go that far.

## **Renaud Girard, Senior reporter and war correspondent at *Le Figaro***

I think it was a betrayal, like in Vietnam. In the Paris Accord, America said to the South Vietnamese, 'We will help you to fight, stand for democracy, stand for your values, and we are leaving Vietnam, where we wanted to replace the French in 1955, but now, we will help you', and then suddenly – it was due to the Congress, I will not come back to that – they were dropped and then there were the boat people, the Red Khmer and everything that happened in Indochina.

My point is that the United States was not compelled to do this nation-building in Afghanistan. They had won the first war, which was to have northern alliance in Kabul, and they had killed – I was there – all these internationalist Arab jihadists who were in Afghanistan and dismantled all the cells and so on.

They chose this nation-building in the Bonn conference. They chose it and it was this ideology. So, you want to do it. They said to the youth of Afghanistan, 'Build information, build

new media'. That is what they told girls – I was there and I listened to what the Americans told them. I listened to what Khalilzad told them. I listened to what the American radio in Afghanistan was saying. They said, 'We will help you build your new society', and they had done that.

A lot of youth in Afghanistan believed in these American values. They believed deeply and these people have been dropped. Why? Because they built an army of 300,000 soldiers, but they did not consider morale in the army; demoralization is very important. That was a major mistake of Biden and, you were right, his Generals were against it. When you drop a base which is very easy to keep, Bagram, you give the message to your ally that this army they have formed is now finished. By the way, if you think that negotiating in Doha with the Taliban without inviting the Afghan government and the Afghan army is not a betrayal, I do not know what else to call it.

### **Jim Bittermann**

That was Mr. Trump's decision. That was not Mr. Biden's decision.

### **Renaud Girard**

That was Trump's decision and Biden followed this policy. It is a betrayal. America lost a lot of money in Afghanistan, like it lost a lot of money in Mesopotamia and in Indochina before 1975, but if you tell me that negotiating the future of a country without inviting the government that you put in place in the Bonn conference is not a betrayal, I cannot think of another word for it.

### **Jim Bittermann**

Well, that was a previous administration and I am not defending it. I am not from the administration, so I cannot speak for the administration, but let me just say that now, the Americans have left. Now the field is open, so let us just see who comes in to improve the life of women, to educate the children of Afghanistan, to defend human rights. Who is going to come in and fill the gap?

### **Ali Aslan**

Absolutely. I think the point you are raising is clear. This was a process that was initiated by Donald Trump, but it was seen through by Joe Biden. I think in both cases, one could argue both decisions were primarily rooted in US domestic political motivation.

### **Renaud Girard**

I think isolation does not help. The American embassy should have been kept open. There were negotiations and America has given Afghanistan to the Taliban. Why close the embassy? Afghanistan needs a government, any government, neoconservatives forgot that. Neoconservatives are right, they hate political dictatorship and Taliban is a political dictatorship.

However, we have to remember that there is something worse than political dictatorship, which is anarchy. There is something worse than anarchy, which is civil war. Now, in Afghanistan, we are between dictatorship and anarchy, a little bit of both. Please let us not go



back to civil war. That is why we have to be there in Afghanistan, to try to do our best so that a civil war does not resume in Afghanistan.